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I don't usually make any comments about other people's writings on movies, not when they appear in the Press. I take it for granted that the usual commercial Press is so corrupt, and so out of step with life and truth, and really, everybody in it writes whatever they want, just to get paid, a job to be done, expressing their tiny, distorted and paranoic minds – so it wouldn't make any sense to try to criticize anybody for what they write in the Press. But *AVATAR* is not the Press. Or maybe it is The Press. Anyway, there is some direction, some attitude of truth in *AVATAR*, and the people who write in *AVATAR* do not write for money but from the urgency of truth. If they aren't sure about something they will try first to find it out for themselves, or you'll see it in their writing, there will be no attempt at Finality, there will be an attitude of Process, of search. Or when some "outrageous" and on the first glance "untruthful" statements are made – usually by Mel – after a deeper consideration one will always find that those outrageous statements operate on the level of paradoxes, or on the level of "shit" or "manure," which, when applied timely, helps young things to grow.

(1968)

After this introduction, I have now to tell you that what prompted me to write this letter or this piece was Adler Smith's comments on Warren Sonbert's films, in the last issue of *AVATAR*. Because Smith's piece is not like any other piece in *AVATAR*: Smith's piece is just another piece from the official, dying Press where one writes not from love but from hate.

Warren Sonbert's movies are about the most beautiful movies around. Adler Smith doesn't have any idea what he is talking about. He kicks and spits at Sonbert's movies because people in them "are doing things couples often do, among them, having fun. If the couples want to have fun, that's all right with me (Sic! it's all right with HIM if we have fun!) – but why should anyone waste good film – color at that – recording . . ." etc. To record the life of people at the moments of joy, which is such an action-less thing, such a fragile thing – and to record it casually, without destroying it, so that it would be there, on film, on the screen – this is about the most difficult thing, and Sonbert does it beautifully. Adler Smith can have his artificial contrivances, and dazzling suspense stories, and breathtaking action movies, they are nice – as long as he doesn't kick at the others which deal with more subtle expressions of man's inner life.

I have watched the growth and the development of Warren Sonbert, and I know how much effort, concentration, and constant work went into achieving this end, and I am not going to let anyone spread a notion that Sonbert just simply woke up one morning, grabbed his camera, swung it around in the room where his friends were having fun, and that was it. Next it was already at the Cinematheque. Such is the art of many of the younger poets, painters, musicians and film-makers that it looks like it's a random thing. Few know about the years of preparation, long years of inner structuring of the aesthetic senses that preceded their art and which now guide their cameras, their fingers, their eyes, the rhythms of their hearts. All that went into *"The Bad and the Beautiful"* which now Adler Smith calls an "atrocity." It's Adler Smith who is, in this instance, an Atrocity. And I really mean it. He may not be doing it consciously, he is just following the vogue, the line of "the people," and in that case is just a tool – still, no matter what, anyone who

sets out to destroy a work of art is destroying the advancing lines of the human soul and is committing an act of atrocity.

One could talk about Sonbert's work at great lengths. For instance, one could go into the structuring of his work, *"The Bad and the Beautiful"* as a film short story, a film narrative. One would, by comparisons, discover, that Warren Sonbert is one of the most advanced and most subtle short story tellers in cinema today. One could go into his handling of camera, as a short story writing instrument – and come to the same conclusions. All this, recognizing, that Sonbert is not a mature artist yet, that he is only searching his own way, and he knows it himself better than anyone else. Adler Smith likes one thing in Sonbert: he likes how Rene Ricard was presented in *"The Bad and the Beautiful."* But if he would be more familiar with the contemporary cinema, he would realize what his statement really means: he would discover that Rene Ricard had appeared in a number of other films, but he was nothing but a nasty

little hippy. It took Sonbert to pull out Rene as he is much deeper, during the moments when he vibrates beauty. Now that can not be done that easily. Only an artist can do that.

These are all little things to think about for Adler Smith before he writes his next piece. My simple advice – if you'll permit me – would be, to start with (and this advice could go to anyone who wants to write on movies): DON'T CRITICIZE. If you think you don't like something – don't write about it. Try to write only about what you like in a movie, write only about those movies which you like, and try to tell what you like in them, why you like them. See if you can think, feel and live according to this "positive" ("love's") direction. After you master this, years and years later, you could venture, little by little, and very carefully, into criticizing (as I am doing now) things. Remember, that when you are criticizing, you may be criticizing God. So think twice. See if you can separate man's work from God's work. Really, you should think more than twice. Because, when one looks from a certain perspective of what the human soul needs today, you are debunking in Warren Sonbert's work exactly those qualities which are God's work thru man to make man more beautiful.

Dorris Mitsler